

UK general election, 2019

Draft: 10 December 2019

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Introduction

A general election is to be held in the UK on 12th December 2019 ...

Forty years ago in 1979 Margaret Thatcher led the Conservatives to victory replacing Jim Callaghan's Labour government. The Conservatives were in government for the next eighteen years, latterly with John Major as prime minister. In 1997 he was defeated and Labour took over with Tony Blair as prime minister. Labour were in government for the next thirteen years, latterly with Gordon Brown as prime minister.

In the 2010 election no party won an overall majority and David Cameron's Conservatives formed a coalition government with Nick Clegg's Liberal Democrats. In 2014 a referendum was held in Scotland and Scottish independence was rejected. The general election of 2015 resulted in a slender majority for David Cameron's Conservatives. In 2016 a referendum on membership of the European Union was held and, against the advice of the government, a majority voted to Leave. David Cameron resigned as prime minister and was replaced by Theresa May. She called an election in 2017 but failed to gain an overall majority and this resulted in a minority Conservative government supported by Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party. In 2019 she resigned as party leader and prime minister and was succeeded by Boris Johnson. It has been a busy decade! See Table 1.

Table 1 UK elections and referendums, 1979-2019

1979-1997	Conservative	Margaret Thatcher; John Major
1997-2010	Labour	Tony Blair; Gordon Brown
2010-2015	Conservative & LibDem	David Cameron
2014	referendum on Scottish independence	
2015-2017	Conservative	David Cameron; Theresa May
2016	referendum on EU membership	
2017-2019	Conservative	Theresa May; Boris Johnson

Note: elections in 1979, 1983, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2017, 2019

The Conservative election slogan has been “Get Brexit Done”. The 2019 election is largely about Brexit and the election was largely brought about by Brexit. The year has seen an impasse in parliament: it was unable to resolve the Brexit issue and this resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Theresa May and the succession of Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Mr Johnson’s insistence on the Brexit deadline of October 31st, and his willingness to countenance a No Deal outcome, led to rebellion by some Conservative ministers and MPs and to confrontation with Parliament. Having reached agreement with the EU on a deal, Mr Johnson sought parliament’s approval of it. Parliament resisted Mr Johnson’s rushed timetable for debating the deal. Mr Johnson called for an election which parliament resisted until it was sure that the possibility of No Deal on October 31st had been averted. This was secured by the EU agreeing to an extension of the deadline. Parliament approved Mr Johnson’s deal in principle subject to sufficient time to debate it in detail. Fearing amendments to his deal, Mr Johnson pulled his deal and called for an election with a view to obtaining a majority government which would support his deal. Having avoided a No Deal outcome, opposition parties agreed to the election.

The key dates

The key dates in the election process are as follows:

October 29 Government wins Commons support for election on December 12.

November 6 Parliament dissolves; official campaigning begins.

November 14 Nominations close.

November: Parties produce manifestos.

19 Green manifesto

20 Lib Dem manifesto

21 Labour manifesto

24 Conservative manifesto

27 SNP manifesto

November/December: election debates are held.

22 BBC: Question Time, leaders separately

26 BBC: Andrew Neil interviews Jeremy Corbyn

28 Channel 4: environment debate (without Cons. and Brexit)

29 BBC: seven-party debate

December 12, Thursday: election.

The agenda: what the election is about

The election is being vigorously contested by the different parties – but what are the issues being contested? Different parties focus on different issues. The fundamental issue of every election is running the country and a standard set of topics are covered in the manifestos. Traditionally three main parties focus on this - Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour – as do some of the other parties while still other parties focus on specific issues, for example the Green Party and the issue of the

In particular there is a variety of issues concerning political geography, about the geographical structure of power, namely which entities should have sovereignty over which territories, and each of these issues has one or more parties associated with it. One of these issues is seen as dominating the election, namely the relations between the UK and the EU: ‘Brexit’. The Brexit Party and UKIP are dedicated to this issue. Another relationship is that between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK and Ireland – the DUP and Sinn Fein having strongly opposing views on this issue. Finally the SNP and Plaid Cymru seek independence for Scotland and Wales, respectively.

Table 2 The agenda: what the election is about

issue	parties
running the country	Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Labour
political geography: UK-EU ... Brexit	Brexit Party, UKIP
Northern Ireland	DUP, Sinn Fein ...
Scotland	SNP
Wales	Plaid Cymru
Environment	Green

The headlines

Table 3 presents the main headlines during the campaign.

Table 3 The main headlines during the campaign (day it happened)

October
Tuesday 29 – Sunday 3
29 Government wins Commons support for election on December 12.
30 Morgan in exodus of moderate Tory MPs ... Brexit Party could have electoral arrangement with the Tories
31 Trump tells Johnson to join forces with Farage
November
1 Johnson bans fracking ... promises tax cut
2 Concern about NHS winter crisis ... Jews will leave if Corbyn wins
3 Parties NHS claims criticised ... Farage could lose election and Brexit
Monday 4 – Sunday 10
4 Farage criticises Boris Brexit deal ... Labour plans
5 Boris Johnson talks about manifesto ... Ex-Labour criticise Corbyn
<u>6 official campaigning begins.</u>
Watson quits as leader of the Labour Party
7 Conservative and Labour spending plans
8 LibDem complaint about BBC debate plans
9 Criticism of Labour’s spending plans
10 Parties using Facebook to try out adverts
11 Conservatives support veterans
12 Conservatives green policy

13 Flooding crisis continues; Labour 4-day week for NHS staff?
 14 Farage refuses to pull Brexit Party candidates in Labour-held marginals
 15 Labour will nationalise Broadband; BBC interview with Duke of York
 16 Every Tory candidate signs Brexit deal pledge
 17 Tories: tighter policy on migrants

18 Three party leaders speak to the CBI
 19 ITV: debate between Johnson and Corbyn
 20 Duke of York stands down; Lib Dems launch manifesto
 21 Labour launch manifesto
 22 BBC: four leaders answer audience questions; Corbyn neutral on Brexit
 23 Labour to help women in pension trap
 24 Conservative launch manifesto

25 Chief Rabbi criticises Corbyn and Labour on antisemitism
 26 Neil asks Corbyn to apologise to Jews
 27 Labour say NHS is on the table in USA talks with Tories
 28 YouGov poll suggests Tory majority of 59; IFS criticises parties' spending plans
 29 *London Bridge knife attack
 30
 Dec 1

December

2 Politicising the London attacks ... attitudes to terrorism and austerity
 3 Donald Trump in UK for NATO meeting
 4 Andrew Neil interviews Jo Swinson ...notes Boris Johnson's lack of response to invitation
 5 Corbyn, Labour and anti-semitism
 6 Johnson and Corbyn debate, BBC
 7
 8 Into the final week: Labour heartland under threat

The situation in abstract

The election situation can be characterised in abstract as follows. One issue is dominant and half the people support policy X. Just one party, A, advocates policy X while several other parties oppose policy X. People vote for a party which shares their opinion on policy X. Party A has the support of half the population while the other half of the population divide their vote between the several other parties. Party A wins the election ... and implements policy X.

The actual situation is like this but a bit more complicated. UK voters are evenly divided between Leave and Remain. They are also evenly divided between 'Group A' parties supporting leave and 'Group B' parties supporting Remain.* There are three Leave parties and five or more Remain parties. The Conservatives, one of the Leave parties, dominate the other two Leave parties, whereas Labour, the top Remain party, is not so dominant over the other Remain parties. Thus the Leave vote is less split than the Remain vote. Overall the dominant Leave party is well ahead of the top Remain party. The main change during the campaign is that the Conservatives have won over almost all of the Leave voters. Although Labour has also increased its support, other Remain parties still have significant support. The UK voting system is capable of translating this situation into an absolute majority for the dominant Leave party in parliament even though the party does not have an absolute majority of the votes. The dominant Leave party forms the government and implements Leave.

However this overall pattern is an aggregate of a complicated pattern of variation across nations, regions and constituencies. Also over the course of the campaign there

have been shifts in the overall vote as well as discussion and formation of electoral pacts between parties. On election day the dominant Leave party may make gains in Leave-voting constituencies but this may be balanced by Remain parties making gains in Scotland and in South-West England which supported Remain. A hung parliament may result.

* We make a distinction between Group A parties and Group B parties. Group A parties are on the Right and in favour of Leave. Group B parties are on the Left and in favour of Remain.

Group A parties are: Conservatives, Brexit Party and UKIP.

Group B parties are: Labour, Lib Dems, SNP, Greens, and Plaid Cymru.

Opinions about Brexit and about the parties

We now consider opinions about Brexit and opinions about the parties and how these opinions have changed over time.

Opinions about Brexit ... a binary perspective

The set of options for Brexit are varied and the possible opinions about Brexit are varied. However in this section we reduce this variation to the simple binary distinction between Remain and Leave.

For the past three years people in the UK have been evenly divided between wanting to remain in the EU and wanting to leave. In the 2016 referendum 52% of voters voted to leave. On the day of the referendum, an opinion poll found that 48% said they wanted to leave. Now in December 2019, opinion polls find that 48% say they want to leave. In fact the percentage in the running average of polls has remained virtually unchanged for the past three years.¹

Remain 48%; Leave 52% (2016 referendum)

Remain 52%; Leave 48% (2016 YouGov opinion poll on day of vote)

Remain 52%; Leave 48% (2019 recent opinion polls ... December 2019)

Recall our distinction between Group A parties and Group B parties. Group A parties are on the Right and in favour of Leave. Group B parties are on the Left and in favour of Remain.

Group A parties are: Conservatives, Brexit Party and UKIP.

Group B parties are: Labour, Lib Dems, SNP, Greens, and Plaid Cymru.

People have been evenly divided between wanting to vote for Group A parties and wanting to vote for Group B parties. Given the Brexit stance of the two groups it is

¹ <https://whatukthinks.org/eu/opinion-polls/euref2-poll-of-polls/> ;
<https://whatukthinks.org/eu/opinion-polls/uk-poll-results/>;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_United_Kingdom_European_Union_membership_referendum;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_United_Kingdom_European_Union_membership_referendum#/media/File:UK_EU_referendum_polling.svg;

not surprising that these party group percentages are similar to the above Leave-Remain percentages.

Group B parties 52%; Group A parties 46% in 2019
(recent opinion poll ... 25-26/11/19)

The corresponding figures in the 2015 and the 2017 elections were:

Group B parties 47%; Group A parties 50% in 2015
Group B parties 53%; Group A parties 44% in 2017

These results need to be placed alongside the reaction to the statement “the 2016 referendum result should be respected” - twice as many people agree as disagree. This would seem to weaken the support of the stance of those who continue to argue for Remain.

“Irrespective of whether or not I voted to leave the EU, the 2016 referendum result should be respected.”
Agree 54%; Disagree 25%; Don’t Know 21%. (ComRes, *Daily Telegraph*, 11 September 2019: 7).

Opinions about Brexit ... a more complex perspective

The above simple binary perspective provides a reasonable first approximation but it needs to be supplemented with an acknowledgement that the situation is more complex. The set of options for Brexit are varied and the possible opinions about Brexit are varied.

First of all, consider the above partition into Group A parties and Group B parties. Consider their manifestos and their voters. The policies of Group B parties vary in the strength of their manifesto support for Remain; and the policies of Group A parties vary in the strength of their manifesto support for Leave. Also Group B parties vary in the strength of their support from Remain voters; and the Group A parties vary in the strength of their support from Leave voters.

Evidence about voter support comes from a survey halfway through the election campaign giving the percentage support for the parties.* In this survey Group A parties had 46% support, almost all of whom were Conservative at 42%. Group B parties had 54% support, split between four parties, with Labour the largest at only 30%. See Table 4.

*The wording of the question prompted the respondent by reminding them which parties and candidates were standing in the respondent’s constituency. This revised wording had been introduced when the Brexit Party decided to contest only half the seats.

Table 4 Support for the parties, halfway through the election campaign

	% support	
Brexit Party	4	
Conservative	42	
Group A parties		46
Green	4	
Labour	30	
SNP	4	
LibDem	16	
Group B parties		54

A party's stance on Brexit can be gauged from their supporters' voting in the 2016 referendum. We can define the Remain score for different groups. The Remain score is the proportion of the group who supported Remain as opposed to supporting Leave in the 2016 Referendum. The Remain score can be thought of as a position in space – in one-dimensional Brexit space.

See Table 5 below. The UK population as a whole has a Remain score of 0.52. None of the parties has a Remain score between 0.20 and 0.70. In other words the overall population is in the middle but the parties are polarised, towards one end or the other. So in this sense none of the parties come close to representing the population as a whole on Brexit.

Table 5 Remain score for different parties, 2016 and 2019²

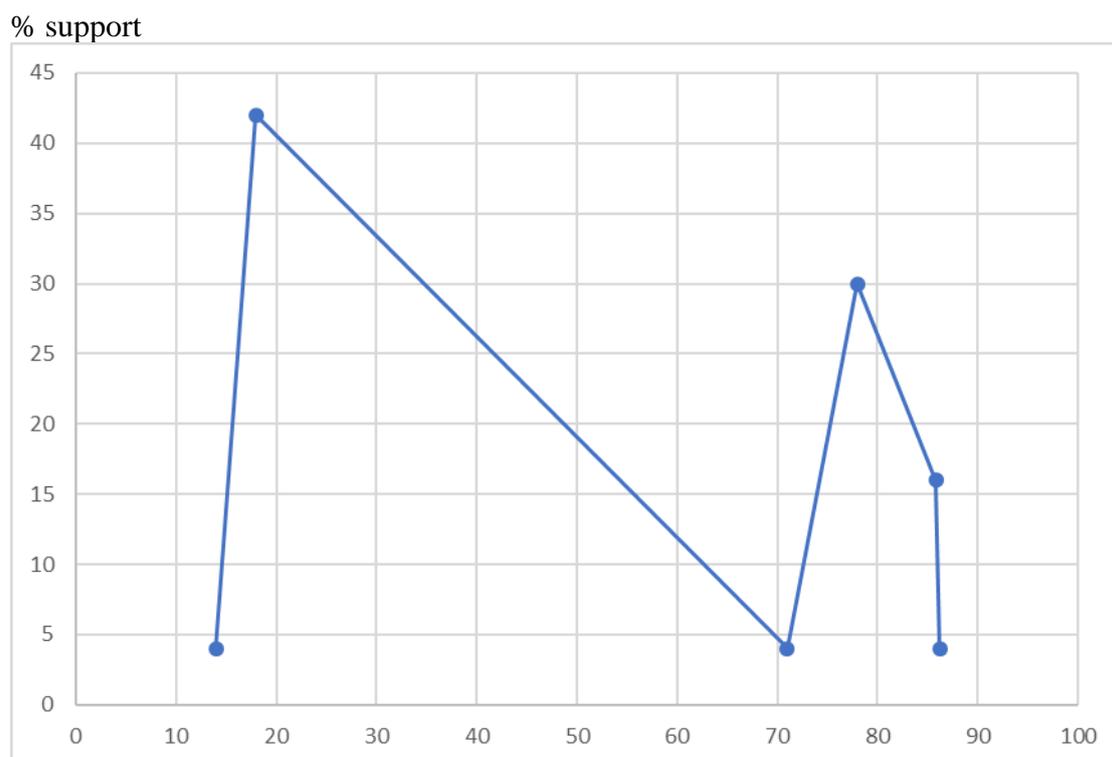
	Remain score
Group A	
Brexit Party	14
Conservative	18
All	52
Group B	
Labour	78
SNP	86
LibDem	86
Green	71

We can combine the information in the above two tables to obtain the distribution of people in parties in Brexit one-dimensional space. See Figure 1.

2

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/0r7hd5gxhg/TheSundayTimes_VI_Results_191122_w.pdf

Figure 1 Voter distribution in Brexit political space



Opinion change, 2010-2019, and during the 2019 campaign

We now consider how opinion has changed over the last decade and in the course of the election.

In Figures 2A and 2B we consider the general elections in 2010, 2015 and 2017; the European elections in 2014 and 2019; the opinion polls last December 2018; and, in 2019, the opinion polls at the start of the campaign (2009 I) and just before the election on 12th December (2009 VII).

[The election of 2010 is interesting for us to look back on now as it takes us back to a time when Brexit was not a major issue (although it was there in the background).]

Groups

The two top trajectories in Figure 2 have much the same shape. The top trajectory is for the support for the three main parties combined, and the second top trajectory is for the support for the top two main parties combined.

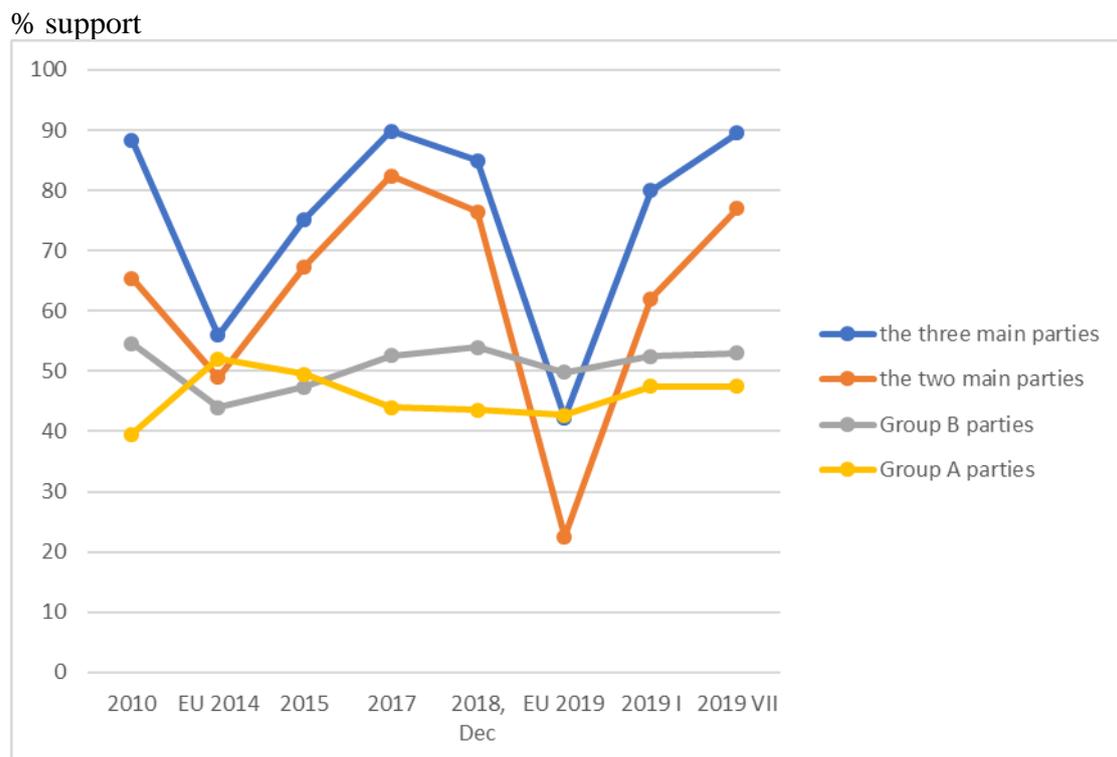
Consider the two main parties, Conservative and Labour, combined. The combined percentage is usually between 60% and 80%. However there are two troughs corresponding to the two European elections, in 2014 (a shallow trough) and 2019 (a deep trough). Looking at general elections, combined support was moderate, 60% to 70%, in 2010 and in 2015; and higher in 2017 and probably in 2019, around 80%. Also the opinion polls were around that level a year ago in December 2018, just at the time when Mrs May began to seek parliament's approval for her Brexit deal. Finally,

during the current campaign, combined support had somewhat recovered from the EU2019 trough by the start of the campaign and proceeded to increase during the campaign.

The trajectory for the two main parties combined provides a template for many of the other trajectories – they have either the same shape or that shape inverted.

In contrast the trajectories for Group A and Group B parties are quite flat, showing that the people have been fairly evenly divided between Group A and Group B over the last decade and through the election campaign. Both trajectories are quite shallow with Group B somewhat akin to the shape of the two main parties' trajectory and Group A somewhat akin to its inverted shape.

Figure 2A Support for groups, 2010-2019



Parties

Conservative and Labour. Each of the two main parties has a similarly shaped trajectory. Labour is somewhat below Conservative in the elections of 2010, 2015 and now in 2019 - but was almost the same as the Conservatives in the 2017 election (Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn then being the party leaders).

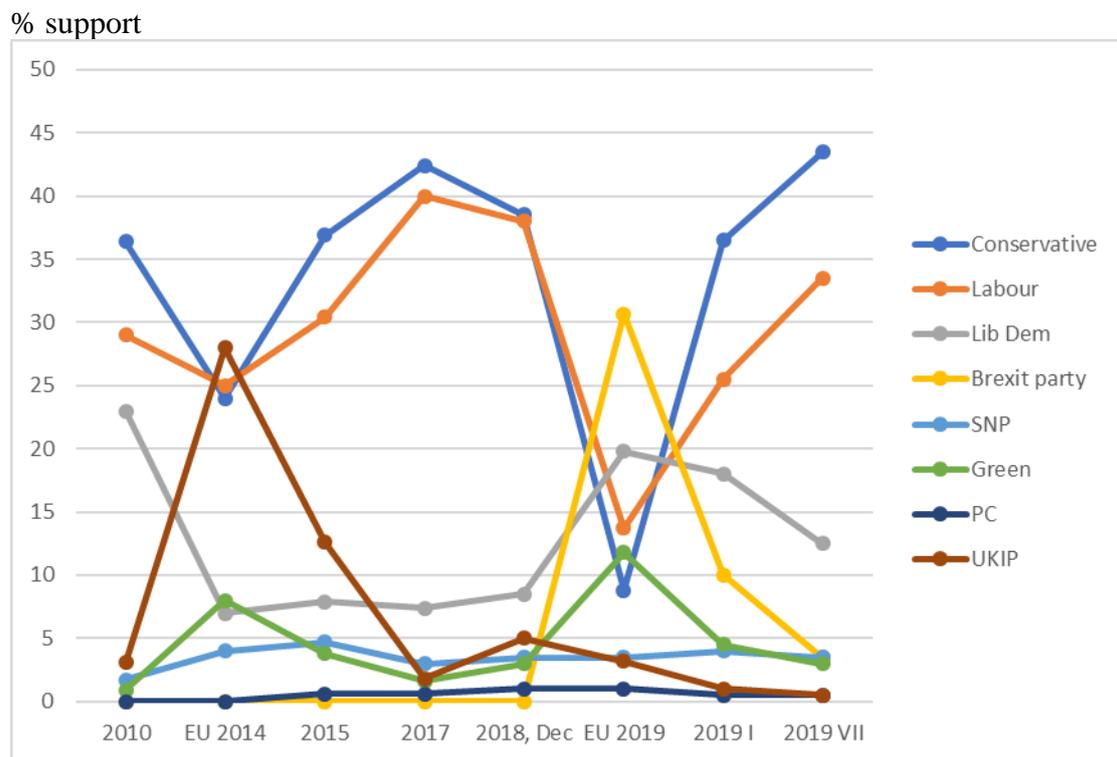
UKIP and the Brexit Party. UKIP peaks for the EU elections in 2014 then falls off, virtually disappearing after the 2016 referendum but registering some support as Mrs May's deal ran into difficulties. Only formed in 2019, the Brexit Party peaks for the EU elections in 2019 but support then falls both before and after the start of the election campaign.

Greens. The Greens show a somewhat similar trajectory to UKIP and the Brexit Party – although at a lower level. This arises because of their better showing in EU elections.

Liberal Democrats. The trajectory for the Liberal Democrats has a distinctive shape. The election of 2010 marked a high point enabling it to be part of the coalition government with the Conservatives. Almost immediately disillusion set in and its support fell dramatically and support remained in single figures for almost a decade. Support recovered for local elections and the EU election of 2019 but then fell before and after the start of the election campaign (but still remaining in double figures).

The figures for SNP and PC are better understood by looking at Scotland and Wales separately. See below.

Figure 2B Support for parties, 2010-2019



We now look at the period of the 2019 election campaign in detail. The last two time points in Figure 2B above show how Conservatives and Labour advance while the Brexit Party and the Lib Dems fell back. In Figure 3 below the campaign percentages are given at weekly intervals, starting with the week before the election was agreed. Each week about a dozen polls were conducted. This gives a range of percentages for each party. Halfway between the highest and lowest percentage is the mid-range estimate. The mid-range is a crude estimate but for simplicity it is what I use here.

2019: October to December

Note: Because of rounding error and because mid-ranges are used there is no guarantee that the percentages add up to 100% - in fact they almost do.

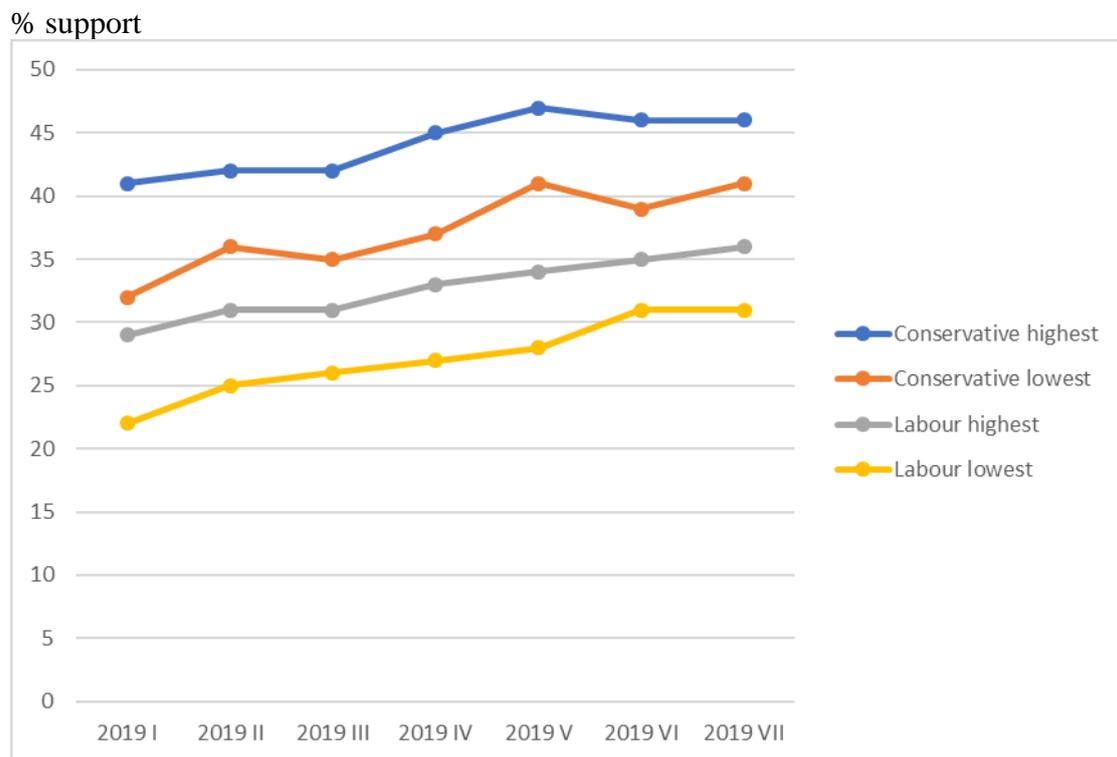
I Opinium/ Observer 15-17 Oct to YouGov/Times 29-30 Oct (twelve)

II Panelbase 30-31 Oct to YouGov/Times 5-6 Nov ... Wed Nov 6 (ten)

III BMG/Independent 5-8 Nov to SavantaComRwes/Telegraph 11-12 Nov ... Wed Nov 13 (eleven)
 IV Panelbase 13-14 Nov to SavantaComRwes/Telegraph 18-19 Nov; YouGov 12-20 Nov ... Wed Nov 20 (twelve)
 V BMG 19-21 Nov to SavantaComRwes/Telegraph 25-26 Nov; (thirteen) ... Wed Nov 27
 Source:
 VI Panelbase 27-28 Nov; to Ipsos Mori 2-4 dec (twelve) ... Wed Dec 4
 VII Panelbase 27-28 nov; to SavantaComRes/Telegraph 2-3 dec ... Mon Dec 9
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_2019_United_Kingdom_general_election#Graphical_summaries

Different opinion polls give different percentage. The gap between the lowest and highest poll percentages is sometimes as much as 10%. Figure 3 provides an illustration of the range giving the lowest and highest percentages for Conservative and Labour. Labour advanced steadily throughout whereas the Conservatives advanced most in the middle period when they were taking votes from the Brexit party.

Figure 3 The election campaign, seven weeks: the lowest and highest percentages for Conservative and Labour



2019: October to December

Earlier we noted the polarisation of the parties in relation to Brexit. However at the time of the referendum in 2016 this polarisation of the parties was not so marked. The first column in Table 6 gives the Remain scores for the parties in 2016.³ At that time differences between the parties were much less marked.

³ Savage, Michael, Francis Elliott and Lucy Fisher (2016) Heartland turned its back on campaign. *The Times*. June 25, p. 7. Source: Lord Ashcroft Polls.

'The UK has voted to leave the European Union. On referendum day I surveyed 12,369 people after they had voted to help explain the result – who voted for which outcome, and what lay behind their decision.'

<https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/>

In 2016 Conservative voters had a Remain score of 42% and Labour voters a Remain score of 63% - a gap between the two parties of 21%. In 2019 Conservative voters had a Remain score of 18% and Labour a Remain score of 78% - a gap between the two parties of 60%. In three years the gap has widened by a factor of three - from 21% to 60%. The remain scores for Conservative and Labour have not changed in the course of the six-week election campaign.

Table 6 Remain score for different parties, 2016 and 2019⁴

	Remain score		change 2016-2019
	2016	2019	
Group A			
(UKIP); Brexit Party	(4)	14	(+10)
Conservative	42	18 (18-22)	-24
All		52	
Group B			
Labour	63	78 (75-80)	+15
SNP	64	86	+22
LibDem	70	86	+16
Green	75	71	-4

John Curtice⁵ notes:

Conservatives provided 45% of Leave support in 2015, 60% in 2017 and 69% in 2019;

Conservatives provided 31% of Remain support in 2015, 23% in 2017 and 19% in 2019.

How social groups vote

John Curtice⁶ also notes:

(i)

In 1987, Conservatives had 33% working class support and 50% middle class support; In 2019, Conservatives had 45% working class support and 41% middle class support.

(ii) Age is now a major factor whereas then it was not.

A few days after the election the papers will report an analysis of how different social groups voted. What follows is what I wrote following the 2017 election.⁷

⁴

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/0r7hd5gxhg/TheSundayTimes_VI_Results_191122_w.pdf

⁵ Curtice, John. "Bridging the class divide will deliver a Conservative victory." *The Times*, December 9, 2019: 7.

⁶ Curtice, John. "Bridging the class divide will deliver a Conservative victory." *The Times*, December 9, 2019: 7.

⁷ Curtis, Chris. "How Britain voted at the 2017 general election." *YouGov News*. June 13, 2017. Accessed: 18 January 2018.

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/06/13/how-britain-voted-2017-general-election/>.

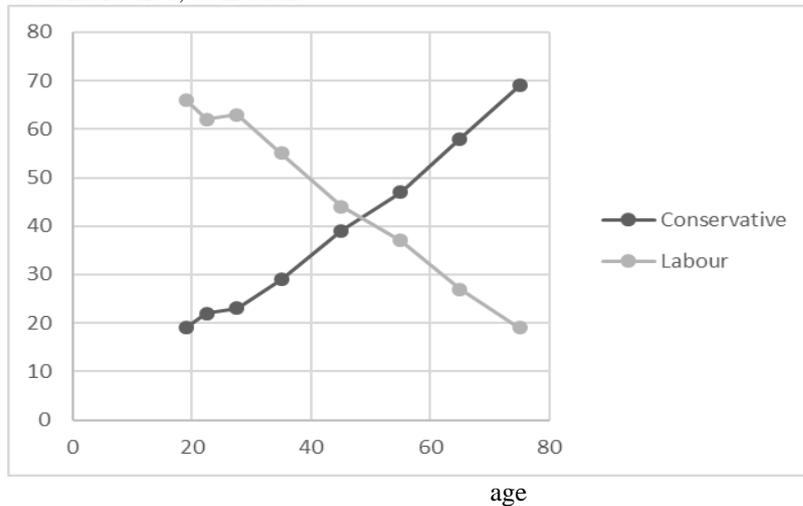
Gender had a very weak link with party preference. The percentage of men voting Conservative was 45% and the percentage of women voting Conservative was 43%, a difference of just 2%.

Age had a very strong link with party preference. Figure 4.1 shows the almost exact linear relationship. Older people were more likely to vote Conservative and less likely to vote Labour. The following equations hold approximately. In Figure 4.1 the age is taken as the mid-point of the range, for example 55 for the range 50-59.

$$\begin{aligned} \% \text{ Conservative} &= \text{age} - 5 \\ \% \text{ Labour} &= 90 - \text{age} \end{aligned}$$

Figure 4.1 Conservative and Labour vote as a function of age

% Conservative; % Labour



Newspaper readership had a very strong link with party preference. Figure 4.2 shows the percentage Conservative vote for the readership of each newspaper and also the percentage of all newspaper readers who read that particular paper. It might be said that each newspaper has a niche in a one-dimensional political space and the niches are fairly equally spaced along the political continuum. The location on the continuum is consistent with the content of the front-page headlines on election day reported in an earlier section. Note that just half the sample reported readership of a newspaper (55%).

Figure 4.2 Newspapers: Conservative vote; and share of readership

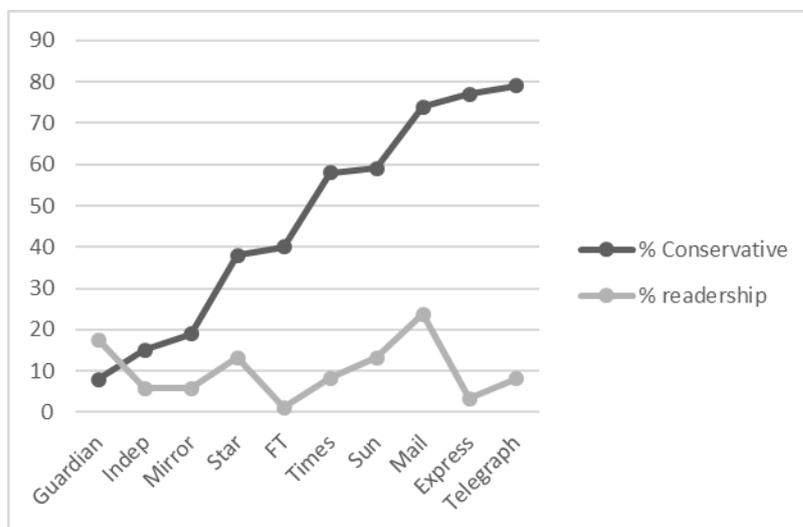


Table 4.5 (on the next page) considers the percentage vote for the Conservatives in various categories of social group. The list of categories in order of increasing range, from a weak to a strong effect on

party preference, is: gender, class, job sector, home, education, work, nation, age and media (newspaper readership).

The groups which are most Conservative in each category are: male, C2 (and AB), private sector, home-owning, low education, retired, in England, over 70 and reading the Daily Telegraph. The groups which are least Conservative in each category are: female, C1 and DE, public sector, neither owner nor renting, high education, student, in Northern Ireland, 18 to 19 years old and reading the Guardian. The largest range is for newspaper readership but that only relates to half the population (55%). The next largest range is for age and the age effect is implicit in some of the other categories such as home, education and work. The low range for social class contrasts with the strong but declining class effect in earlier decades.

Table 4.5 The percentage Conservative vote in different categories of social group

	gender	class	sector	home	educ	work	nation	age media
% range	2	6	11	21	23	44	45	50,71
Daily Telegraph								79
Age 70+								69
Retired						63		
Low education					55			
Owner				53				
Private sector			50					
C2		47						
AB		46						
England							45.6	
Medium educ.					45			
Male	45							
Female	43							
C1		41						
DE		41						
Part-time						40		
Full-time						39		
Public sector			39					
Not working						36		
Wales							33.6	
Rent				32				
Neither owner/rent				32				
High educ.					32			
Scotland							28.6	
Unemployed						28		
Student						19		
Age 18-19								19
Guardian								8
Northern Ireland							0.5	

Table 4.6 below compares the range in the Conservative vote with the range in the Labour vote for different categories of social group. The ranges are almost identical. As one would expect the relationships are reversed: social groups (for example, Telegraph readership) which are high-vote Conservative are low-vote Labour; and vice-versa, for example, Guardian readership.

Table 4.6 The range in percentages in Conservative and Labour vote in different categories of social group

	gender	class	sector	home	educn.	work	nation	age	media
Conservative	2	6	11	21	23	44	45	50	71
Labour	4	6	10	20	16	40	49	47	61

The red wall: from West to East? or around cities? ... the urban-rural divide

“Mr Johnson spent most of yesterday in Labour’s heartlands.”

The cartoon shows a red brick wall. Jeremy Corbyn is on the far side of the wall. He is on a ladder cementing in an extra course of bricks, thus strengthening the wall ... except that Boris Johnson is on this side of the wall, striding towards the wall, brushing it aside like a curtain.⁸

There has been much talk about a red wall protecting Labour seats in the North but which has now crumbled to allow Conservatives to win these Leave-voting seats. However there is no Labour wall dividing a Labour north from a Conservative south. The 2017 electoral map of England has a sea of blue with many red clusters, large and small, marking where cities and towns are controlled by Labour. The major Labour clusters are:

London and Bristol in the South; Birmingham in the Midlands; and the Chester-Liverpool-Manchester-S.Yorkshire ribbon and Tyne-Tees in the North.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_United_Kingdom_general_election#/media/File:2017UKElectionMap.svg

The December 10 map from YouGov does indeed indicate inroads into these Northern clusters.
<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/12/10/final-2019-general-election-mrp-model-small->

Aggregated into regions this gives a gradient of South to Midlands to North. See Table 7. However the urban-rural divide is more fundamental.

“Johnson heads for big majority. Only survey to forecast hung parliament in last election predicts Tories will win 359 seats – giving them cushion of 68
 Elliott, Francis. *The Times*, November 28, 2019: 1, 6-7.

The survey reported on November 28 also predicted the outcome for each constituency. In particular it identified the 44 seats which Labour would lose to the Conservatives. Many of these seats were in the North West, Yorkshire & Humberside and West Midlands. Note: 44 seats are 17% of Labour’s current number of seats.

⁸ Wright, Oliver and Zeffman, Henry. “Johnson: tactical voting leads to first circle of hell.” *The Times*, December 10, 2019:11, 27.

On the one hand this is surprising in that these regions are ones where the Conservatives are weaker and have fewer seats. The first column of Table x below shows that Conservatives are strongest in the South, middling in the Midlands and weakest in the North. However it is not really surprising: areas which have fewer Conservative seats have more non-Conservative seats and so more possible seats to gain!

It has been suggested that the North voted Leave and so although normally strongly Labour, it will swing away from Labour in order to vote for a party supporting Leave. Although the Leave effect is no doubt present, the null hypothesis would be that the Leave effect is the same across the country.

Table 7 Regions in England: percentage of Conservative seats in 2017;

Region	% seats Cons	% Leave 2016
North:		
North East	10.0	58
North West	26.7	54
London	29.2	40
Yorks & Humber	31.5	58
Midlands:		
West Midlands	59.3	59
East Midlands	67.4	59
South:		
South West	85.5	53
East	86.2	57
South East	86.7	52

An election about the geographical structure of power

The winning slogan in the 2016 referendum was ‘Take Back Control’: the UK would take control back from the EU. Thus the slogan was demanding a change in the geographical structure of power. And the present election in 2019 might be seen as an election about the geographical structure of power:

In the UK, half (47%) the people want independence from the EU.

In Northern Ireland, half (50%) the people want independence from the UK.

In Scotland, half (46%) the people want independence from the UK.

In Wales, a third (36%) of the people want independence from the UK.

All the above use a binary perspective.

A more complex perspective looks at voter distribution in political space.

Northern Ireland

The mid-range percentages of two polls in November 2019 give: 28% DUP; 24% Sinn Fein; 13% SDLP; 9.5% UUP; 15.5% Alliance; 9.5% Other.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_2019_United_Kingdom_general_election#Northern_Ireland

In Northern Ireland, half the people want independence from the UK. The one poll in September-December 2019 give: 46% Yes for a United Ireland; 45% No and 9% Don't Know. Headline: 50% Yes, 50% No. This is a binary perspective ...

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Ireland#Opinion_polling

... a more complex perspective looks at a range of options.

Do you think the long-term policy for Northern Ireland should be for it

	%
... to remain part of the United Kingdom, with direct rule	21
... to remain part of the United Kingdom, with devolved government	41
or, to reunify with the rest of Ireland?	19
Independent state	2
Other answer	1
Don't know	16

The middle option (median) was the majority option.

https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2018/Political_Attitudes/NIRELND2.html

Scotland

The mid-range percentages of seven polls in September-December 2019 give: 41.5% SNP; 24.5% Conservative; 16.5% Labour; 11.5% Lib Dem; 1.5% Green; 3% Brexit. The two main UK parties have increased their share from 35% to 50%. SNP has ranged between 39% and 44%.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_2019_United_Kingdom_general_election#Scotland

In Scotland, half the people want independence from the UK. The mid-range percentages of eight polls in September-December 2019 give: 43% Yes for Scottish independence; 49.5% No and 8.5% Don't Know. Headline: 46% Yes, 54% No. This is a binary perspective ...

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_on_Scottish_independence

... a more complex perspective looks at a range of options.

“During the late 1970s and 1980s, MORI conducted opinion polls on whether Scots wanted full independence, [devolution](#) or the status quo (14% to 35%). During this period, devolution was the preferred option in each opinion poll, although support for independence increased.”

	independence	devolution	pre-devolution status quo
1970s-1980s	14% to 35%	41% to 53%	14% to 35%
1988-1995	5%-12%; 20%-31%*	40% to 52%	15% to 25%
1999 -2017	23% to 46%	41% to 62%	6% to 17%
*outside the EEC; inside the EEC			
Voters in England			
1999 -2017	14% to 26%	43% to 60%	11% to 23%

The middle option (median) is the majority option.

Wales

The mid-range percentages of four polls in October-December 2019 give: 11% Plaid Cymru; 32.5% Conservative (37% latest); 32.5% Labour (40% latest); 11% Lib Dem; 2.5% Green; 10% Brexit. The two main parties have increased their share from 54 % to 77%.

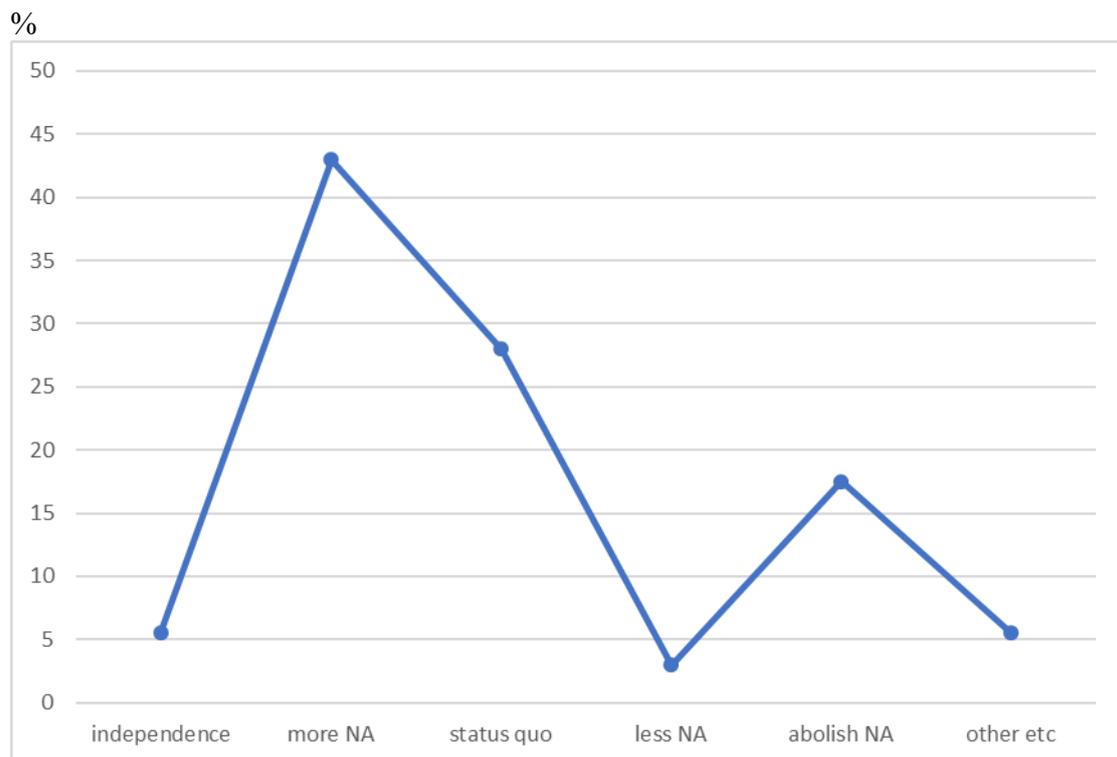
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_2019_United_Kingdom_general_election#Wales

In Wales, a third of the people want independence from the UK. The mid-range percentages of two questions in a poll in September 2019 give: 28.5% Yes for Welsh independence; 50% No and 21.5% Don't Know. Headline: 36% Yes, 64% No. This is a binary perspective ...

... a more complex perspective looks at a range of options. The mid-range percentages of seven polls in 2014-2019 give: 5.5% independence; 43% more powers for National Assembly; 28% status quo; 3% fewer powers for NA; 17.5% abolition of NA; 5.5% other etc. The voter distribution in political space is given in the figure below. The middle option (median) - is the majority option.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_independence

Figure 4 Welsh independence: voter distribution in political space



The predicted number of seats in parliament

“Johnson heads for big majority. Only survey to forecast hung parliament in last election predicts Tories will win 359 seats – giving them cushion of 68

Elliott, Francis. *The Times*, November 28, 2019: 1.

There have been various attempts to use the opinion polls to predict the number of seats in parliament, often emphasising that it is always difficult to do this with accuracy and that furthermore the situation in this election is more complex with different patterns in different constituencies.

Throughout the campaign the Conservatives have enjoyed a substantial lead over Labour and many of the predictions suggest that the Conservatives will enjoy a substantial majority of the seats in parliament.

Just a fortnight before election day The Times reported YouGov projection based on a survey of over ten thousand people over the period 19-27 November 2019.

Table 8 Projected seats in parliament in 2019; also corresponding vote shares in 2019 and seats in 2017

	vote share 2019	seats 2017	seats 2019
Conservative	43	381	359
Labour	32	262	211
SNP	3	35	43
Lib Dem	14	12	13
PC	0.5	4	4
Green	3	1	1
Other	1		1

Northern Ireland excluded

See also a YouGov survey the previous week of 11,277 people over the period 12-20 November 2019.

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus/uploads/document/elhcjlt1lq/Internal_AgeGE_Nov19_v2.pdf

On 9th December, just a few days short of election day John Curtice mentioned various estimates for the number of Conservative seats: 344, 345 and 350 or so.

Predicting the results

There are attempts to predict various aspects of the results: the overall percentage votes; the overall number of seats, individual seats etc.

There is usually great interest in whether the opinion polls in the lead up to the election match up to the actual results. The size of the difference is of interest but also whether or not the polls correctly predict the winner. The polls are usually ‘pretty close’ but sometimes the error is more than it should be. In recent years the exit poll has been quite accurate – not surprisingly.

A quite different approach is to consider how party support changes over the long term. Burt considers the voting trajectory for UK general elections over the period 1945-2015. He estimates equations which express the vote in the current election in terms the vote in the previous election and (effectively) an equilibrium value. We can apply these equations to obtain predictions of the actual results.

Table 9 Predictions

	equilibrium 1945-2015	2017 result	model-based prediction 2019	opinion polls 9 Dec 2019
two main parties	72.5*	82.4	81.1*	77
Conservative	40.5	42.4	41.7	43.5
Labour	35.6	40	38.9	33.5
Liberal Democrat	13.8	7.4	9.8	12.5

*predicted separately

The long-term model is of intrinsic interest even though. However the equations are probabilistic and have a considerable error. So the opinion polls are likely to provide more accurate predictions, the more recent they are and the larger the sample size the better, and so the Exit poll is likely to be the most accurate.

STOP PRESS, 11 December 2019

Final 2019 general election MRP model: small Conservative majority likely
<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/12/10/final-2019-general-election-mrp-model-small->

“Most Tory gains likely in the north, in areas that voted Leave, while they are performing less well in the south, London and Scotland

YouGov’s latest and final general election MRP model shows the Conservative Party headed for an overall majority. Predicted vote shares in our final poll have the Conservatives on 43%, Labour on 34%, the Liberal Democrats on 12% and the Brexit Party on 3% .

These vote shares translate into 339 seats for the Conservatives, 231 for Labour, 41 for the SNP and 15 for the Liberal Democrats - giving the Conservatives an overall majority of 28.

... Like all predictions our model comes with some uncertainty, and the margin of error here could put the final number of Conservative seats from 311 to 367. This means that we absolutely cannot rule out the 2019 election producing a hung Parliament - nor can we rule out a larger Conservative majority.

... More importantly, over the last fortnight we've seen the Conservative lead and the number of seats they are projected to win gradually fall. There are two days until polls close and time for voters to change their minds.

The fieldwork for the poll was conducted between the 4th of December and **this morning [Tuesday 10 December]**, based on 105,612 interviews.”

My own speculation ... If Labour increases by 8% over 40 days, that is 0.2% a day. Another 2 days gives an extra 0.4%?

The 2017 election polls

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_2017_United_Kingdom_general_election#/media/File:Opinion_polling_UK_2017_election_short_axis.png